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On the Hire System

A DRAWING-ROOM COMEDY

By Mrs. Louisa L. Lang

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On the Hire System

A DRAWING-ROOM COMEDY

By Mrs. Louisa L. Lang

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DRAMATIS PERSONÆ.

LORD WILLIAM CHESTERTON, rich and eccentric bachelor.

SIR GEORGE MARCHMONT, his friend.

MISS SUSAN DALYRYMPLE, friend of Lady Gwen. Butterfield.

LADY GWENDOLEN BUTTERFIELD, widow, sister to Lord W.
Chesterton.

MISS BLANCHE SOMERTON, in love with Lord W. Chesterton.

Footmen.

SCENE.—*Drawing-room of LADY GWENDOLEN BUTTERFIELD'S
house near Wargrave-on-Thames. It looks out towards
river, with garden between.*

THE
OFFICE OF THE
SHERIFF
COUNTY OF
SHERBORN
MASS.
1871

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JAN 10 1871

SCENE I.—LADY GWEN. BUTTERFIELD'S *drawing-room, house on Thames, near Wargrave. Drawing-room looks on garden.*

Enter LADY GWEN, and LORD WILLIAM CHESTERTON, talking.
LADY GWEN.

So you have got back from Paris again after leaving me to face all your difficulties for you. (*Sits on sofa.*) I do wish you would try to find some one to settle down with. That detestable Lady Jessop follows me everywhere, thrusting her daughter on me, and asking me all sorts of embarrassing questions; and that horrid little widow with the bronze hair and brazen face dodges about after me till I feel I could murder her. I am a perfect martyr to your matrimonial prospects. Can you find no nice girl who will put up with your eccentricities for the sake of your fortune?

LORD WILLIAM.

Plenty, only I don't ask them to. The sacrifice would be more than I deserve—or desire.

{Sits on arm of chair.

LADY GWEN.

I really think you might have some consideration for me. One would think you must be dreadfully unattractive if you cannot find one girl who can really care for you. There must be *some one* who could do it.

LORD WILLIAM.

No doubt, but I shall never know her.

LADY GWEN.

There is Blanche Somerton.

LORD WILLIAM.

There is.

LADY GWEN.

Now, I really think she cares for you.

LORD WILLIAM.

But I don't care for her.

LADY GWEN.

You might do worse.

LORD WILLIAM.

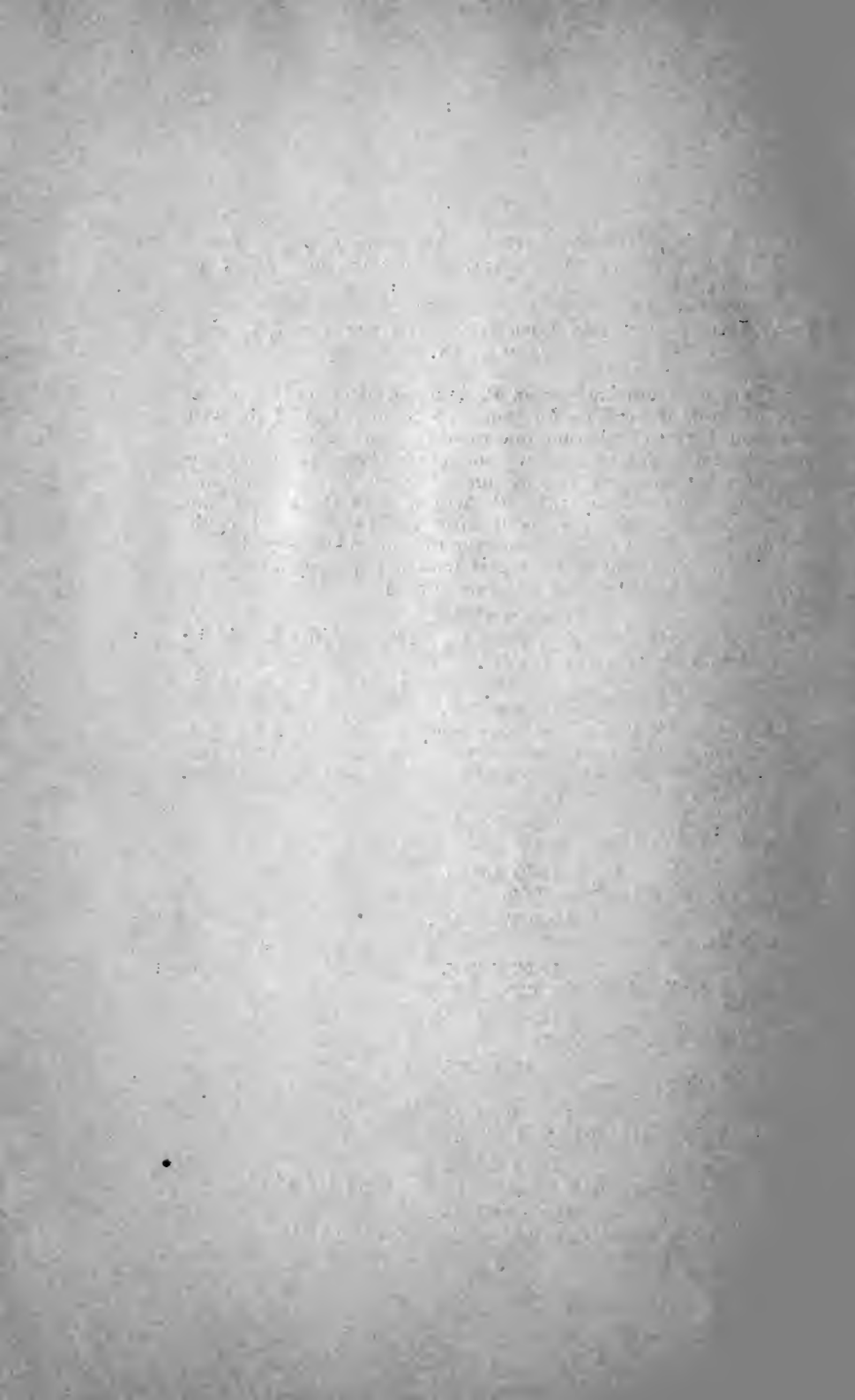
I might do better—I hope I shall.

LADY GWEN.

Have you never met a really nice, disinterested girl?

LORD WILLIAM.

Yes, but she was always engaged to some one else.



On the Hire System:

LADY GWEN. (*jumps up and crosses to LORD WILLIAM*).

Upon my word you are too aggravating. I must insist, William, that you get engaged to some one if you mean to remain under my roof. My nerves will simply hold out no longer under the strain of warding off designing females. For Heaven's sake get engaged to some one, even if it were only for a fortnight. You need not marry her, but for Heaven's sake do something.

LORD WILLIAM.

I will go abroad.

LADY GWEN. (*sinking in chair*).

And leave me to go about alone! How selfish men are.

LORD WILLIAM.

My dear Gwen.. I don't want to go abroad. I am not the type of Englishman who likes killing things perpetually, and eternal yachting palls; but you ask impossibilities.

[*Rises and walks up and down.*]

LADY GWEN.

Not at all. I don't ask you to marry, even. I only ask you to get engaged.

LORD WILLIAM.

That leads to marriage.

LADY GWEN.

By no means. At the worst you can say there is *delirium tremens* in the family. I am sure you are eccentric enough for anything, just like my poor father. No one knows how eccentric *he* was, and so rude—thank goodness, you aren't that?

Enter SIR GEORGE MARCHMONT.

Ah, here is Sir George, just in time. We were discussing William's future. He must positively get engaged. I am worn out with facing people who want him as a son-in-law, or as a provision for their old age.

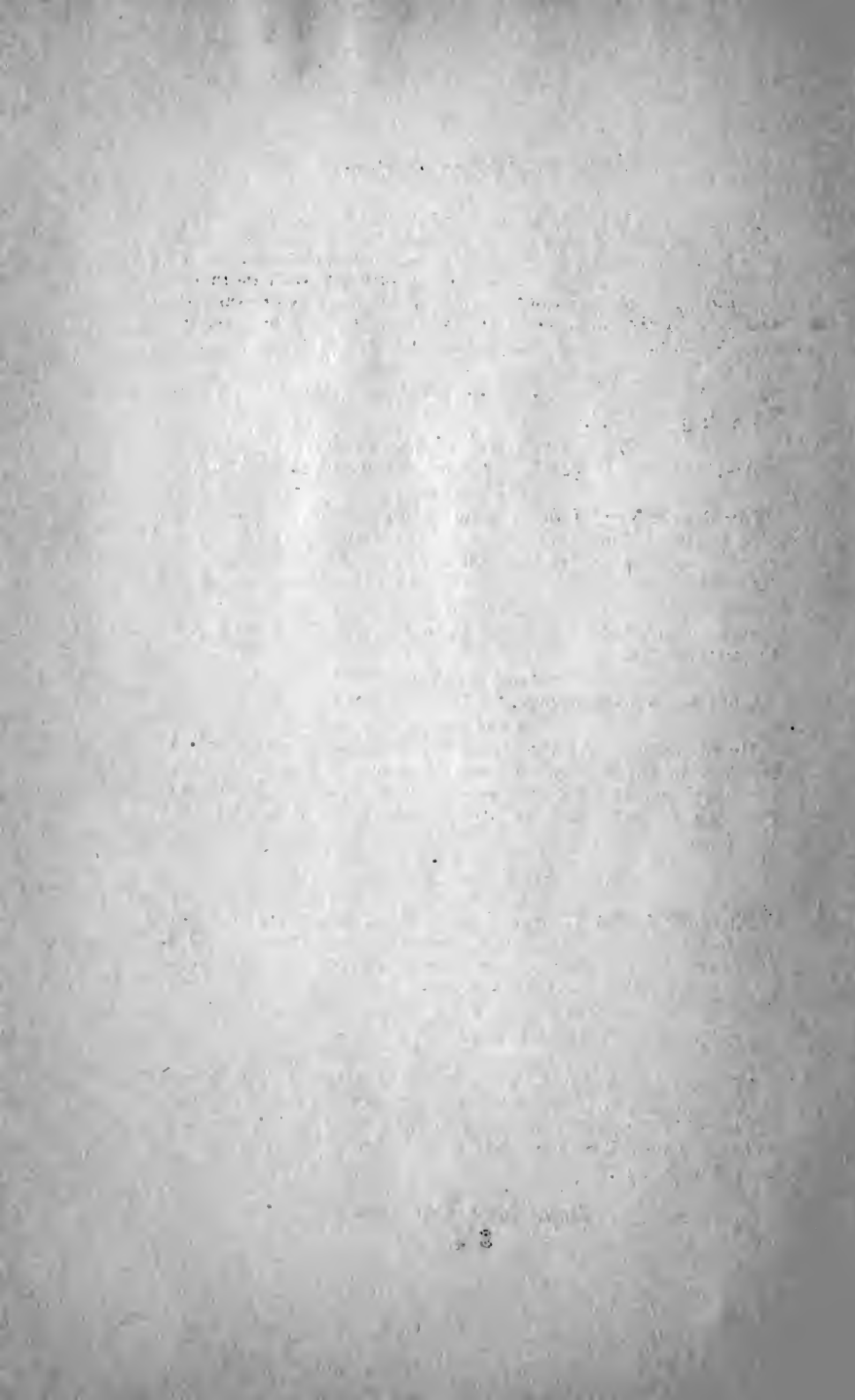
SIR GEORGE.

And what does William say?

LADY GWEN.

William keeps out of the way, and when things become serious he has urgent business in Paris. As this is my day at home I have no doubt you will shortly see some of William's pseudo-fiancées arrive to claim him. The scenes I go through. . . .

Enter MISS DALRYMPLE.



A Drawing-Room Play.

LADY GWEN. (*coming forward*).

Ah, Miss Dalrymple, what a pleasure to see you again! I was just going to show Sir George Marchmont (*both bow*) my Indian curios. Will you amuse my brother for a moment? (*Introducing*) My brother, Lord William Chesterton—ah, you know William, I see, already. (*Aside.*) They always know William.

[*Goes to the left with Sir GEORGE.*]

LORD WILLIAM (*right centre*).

Miss Dalrymple, by all that's fortunate! What an age since I have seen you? z

MISS DALRYMPLE (*tragically*).

Ah, no one ever meets me now in society.

LORD WILLIAM.

Why not? Have you run away with some one else's husband?

MISS DALRYMPLE.

My mother has turned serious. She does not approve of the world. She says it is hollow. Do you find it hollow?

LORD WILLIAM.

On the contrary, I find it full of inconvenient complications.

MISS DALRYMPLE.

Ah, you are lucky. (LORD WILLIAM *draws chair for her and sits beside her.*) You can do what you like; you need not sit at home and sew scratchy shirts for Honolulu, when you are dying to amuse yourself.

LORD WILLIAM.

No, but I should like to. May I come and sew too?

MISS DALRYMPLE.

We admit no one but missionaries.

LORD WILLIAM.

Would you not admit me?

MISS DALRYMPLE.

No; you are of the world, worldly—and nice.

LORD WILLIAM.

You must be a cheerful lot. You should marry.

MISS DALRYMPLE.

Marry? Good gracious! I told you I wanted to amuse myself.

LORD WILLIAM.

You want to amuse yourself, and you don't want to marry—what do you propose to do?

MISS DALRYMPLE (*despairingly*).

I can't think; but something must be done, or I shall murder a missionary.



On the Hire System:

LORD WILLIAM,

(*walks up and down room*).

(*Aside*) This is my chance. I wonder how she would take it. (*Aloud*) Should you think me very eccentric if I proposed you should become engaged in a *perfectly platonic* way to me for a month or two?

MISS DALRYMPLE.

How can you be so ridiculous? I thought you were going to propose a real solution of the difficulty.

LORD WILLIAM.

So I am. (*Stops.*) My sister has just been complaining that I am not an engaged man. You complain that you are not amused. Let us amuse ourselves in spite of our relations. We will take each other on the *hire* system for a month or two. You will ward off designing females, I shall not be troublesome. I am not in the least domestic.

MISS DALRYMPLE.

It almost sounds feasible.

LORD WILLIAM.

It sounds *quite* feasible.

MISS DALRYMPLE.

You are sure you would not think the worse of me?

LORD WILLIAM.

The worse? I should worship you. You would be my salvation.

MISS DALRYMPLE.

—And you would—you wouldn't—you would take no mean advantages?

LORD WILLIAM.

Never, as I am a mortal man.

MISS DALRYMPLE.

What fun it would be! I almost think I will.

LORD WILLIAM.

Think it quite, not almost.

MISS DALRYMPLE.

I—I—oh, what fun! I *will*!

LORD WILLIAM.

You swear?

[*Holds out his hand.*

MISS DALRYMPLE.

I swear.

[*Puts hers in it.*

LORD WILLIAM.

I may have to kiss you now and then just in the way of business.

MISS DALRYMPLE (*skipping off chair*).

Never!



A Drawing-Room Play.

LORD WILLIAM.

I fear I must, unpleasant as it may be to us both.

MISS DALRYMPLE.

Never. How—how—Samuel would not like it.

LORD WILLIAM.

Who is Samuel?

MISS DALRYMPLE.

I have to obey Samuel.

LORD WILLIAM.

Are you engaged? Capital! capital! You must square Samuel, and tell him you've hired me for two months to take his part. Where is Samuel?

MISS DALRYMPLE.

In India.

LORD WILLIAM.

Oh! then I would not disturb Samuel's peace of mind for so short a time. Perhaps it will answer all purposes if I sometimes pass my arm round your waist.

MISS DALRYMPLE.

Certainly not.

LORD WILLIAM.

There must be a few endearments to make it seem lifelike. I must insist on this. I shall of course call you darling. Susan darling, it sounds very well.

MISS DALRYMPLE.

Certainly not. Samuel would not like it.

LORD WILLIAM.

I must insist that Samuel shall not be flung in my face every time I make a suggestion. Here is my sister—I must tell her.

[*Re-enter* LADY GWEN.

MISS DALRYMPLE.

Nonsense. (*He insists.*) Oh, very well then, but I must go first. Be sure you explain properly. (*To* LADY GWEN-DOLINE, *confusedly*) I am afraid I must go. Lord William will tell you. I am obliged to—to—to—— Good-bye.

LORD WILLIAM.

I shall come and see you downstairs (*aside*), darling. Susan darling. (*MISS DALRYMPLE tears the door open. Exeunt. LORD WILLIAM returns and closes door.*) Congratulate me—I am engaged.

LADY GWEN.

William, what on earth have you and Miss Dalrymple been about? Designing little creature! I thought you were safe for five minutes, I'm sure.



On the Hire System:

LORD WILLIAM.

For two months from this date Miss Dalrymple and I are engaged. I am happy, you are happy, she is happy, we are all happy. You bade me become engaged. I am engaged. Behold me!

LADY GWEN. (*aside*).

Another of William's scrapes.

[*Exeunt.*]

SCENE II.—*Same room as before.*

Enter LORD WILLIAM.

LORD WILLIAM.

Susan! Susan!! Susan!!!

MISS DALRYMPLE (*running in*).

I do wish you would stop howling Susan all over the house in that senseless way. How can you be so stupid?

LORD WILLIAM.

It makes our engagement public. It can't be too public to please me. Besides, it makes you look nice when you are confused.

MISS DALRYMPLE.

I am sure any one would look confused who had to do with a lunatic like you. My dear William, every one must know we are engaged from the grooms upwards and downwards.

LORD WILLIAM.

Do you think so? That's capital—and you called me your dear William. You are learning to be a little familiar, that is a great improvement, and will make things much easier and pleasanter. Here's some one coming. Let me adjust my arms round your waist.

[*Advances with his arm in position.*]

MISS DALRYMPLE (*skipping away*).

I insist on your going to the other side of the room and keeping there. Oh, Heavens, what an awful thing it is to have any one on the hire system? You're a thousand times worse than Samuel.

LORD WILLIAM.

Hang Samuel!

[*Steps behind her.*]

MISS DALRYMPLE.

Well, you are unkind when Samuel is your safeguard and

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A Drawing-Room Play.

--and--and--deposit receipt. (*Looking round*—LORD WILLIAM *strokes her hair effusively*). Is there any one coming? for if there isn't you might take your hand away. Oh, it's Sir George.

Enter SIR GEORGE MARCHMONT.

SIR GEORGE.

Oh! I beg your pardon—I was looking for Lady Gwen.

[*Prepares to go.*]

MISS DALRYMPLE.

No, no; don't go. (*Runs after him and catches him by arm*). William is going.

LORD WILLIAM.

Susan, I insist that you take your hand off Sir George's arm. Remember you are engaged to me, not Sir George.

MISS DALRYMPLE.

William, you were going.

LORD WILLIAM.

I was not.

MISS DALRYMPLE.

William, you will go?

LORD WILLIAM.

I will *not*.

MISS DALRYMPLE.

Then *I* will, with Sir George. Good-bye, dear.

[*Kisses her hand and exit with SIR GEORGE.*]

LORD WILLIAM *follows, shouting "Susan!"*

Enter LADY GWEN, and BLANCHE SOMERTON.

LADY GWEN.

William!

LORD WILLIAM.

I can't stop. I am going with Susan.

LADY GWEN.

I must insist that you don't rush after Susan all day long. Even the very servants sniggle at the very name of Susan now.

LORD WILLIAM.

Why should I not? If I don't keep my eye on her, she flirts with George Marchmont, and turns his head when she ought to be turning mine.

LADY GWEN.

I am sure I don't wonder. She must be thankful to get rid of you for a few minutes.



On the Hire System:

LORD WILLIAM.

She has no business to wish to get rid of me.

LADY GWEN.

Well, at any rate you can stay here now and entertain Blanche while I go and look after those wearisome Jessops.

LORD WILLIAM (*aside*).

You're never going to leave me alone with Blanche.

LADY GWEN.

(*aside to Lord William*).

Why not? You are an engaged man: it is quite safe to leave you with any one now, thank goodness.

[*Erit.*

MISS SOMERTON (*tragically*).

I never thought when I parted from you last I should meet you next as an engaged man.

[*Sits on sofa.*

LORD WILLIAM.

Why not? Did you think it impossible for any one to love me?

[*Sits on arm of sofa.*

MISS SOMERTON.

Oh, no, of course not; but I thought you hated the thought of matrimony.

LORD WILLIAM.

So I do; at least so I did till I met Susan; she's breaking me in.

MISS SOMERTON.

It does seem funny. Do you think you will like being married?

LORD WILLIAM.

I should like anything with Susan.

MISS SOMERTON.

You have been so often reported engaged. I remember you were once said to be engaged to me—

LORD WILLIAM.

Was I? (*Recoils.*) I must tell Susan she must look after me carefully when I am with you.

MISS SOMERTON.

Are you so afraid you will not keep true?

LORD WILLIAM.

Not in the least; but one is never safe from designing persons till one is married, and it is now Susan's duty to see that I do not fall into their clutches.



A Drawing-Room Play.

MISS SOMERTON.

Surely there are women who would have suited you better and understood you better?

LORD WILLIAM.

No; I don't think so. Susan understands me as few do.

MISS SOMERTON.

She is fortunate, and very clever.

LORD WILLIAM.

You see she knows what I mean.

MISS SOMERTON.

Does no other woman do so? [*Reproachfully.*]

LORD WILLIAM.

Well, you see they generally think I mean more than I do. Now Susan doesn't: she thinks I mean less.

MISS SOMERTON.

I see. She can't care for you much——

LORD WILLIAM.

On the contrary, she finds me delightful. I must really go and see what she is up to with George.

MISS SOMERTON.

You don't seem to have much confidence in her. Can you not be away from her for five minutes?

LORD WILLIAM.

Not without getting very nervous.

Re-enter SUSAN and SIR GEORGE.

Ah, here she is, making eyes at George as hard as she can. I must put a stop to that.

MISS SOMERTON

(*laying hand on LORD WILLIAM's arm*).

And yet you said she loved you.

LORD WILLIAM.

On the contrary, I said she understood me. Susan!

MISS DALRYMPLE.

Good gracious! here's William again. Thank goodness! he has another woman with him. Well, William dear, I am glad to see you so well employed.

LORD WILLIAM (*aside*).

I am not well employed. Miss Somerton has all but proposed to me. You promised to protect me; do you call this protecting me? You show me no attention. You must do something marked or she will snap me up in spite of you.



On the Hire System:

MISS DALRYMPLE

(*suddenly hurls herself into LORD WILLIAM'S arms*);
Will this do?

LORD WILLIAM.

Pretty well. Couldn't you say something as well?

MISS DALRYMPLE (*very loud*).

I *did* think I could *trust* you!

[MISS SOMERTON *shudders visibly*.

SIR GEORGE.

Hullo! quick here! Miss Somerton is fainting.

[LORD WILLIAM *hurries back*.

SIR GEORGE (*coming forward*).

Miss Dalrymple, you said your engagement to William was simply a comedy? Do you call this a comedy?

MISS DALRYMPLE.

Distinctly.

SIR GEORGE.

Do you mean to tell me that you don't care for Chesterton when you embrace him before my eyes?

MISS DALRYMPLE.

Certainly. I only wanted to make an agreeable diversion. I have done it. Go and help Miss Somerton.

SIR GEORGE.

She doesn't want me. She has Chesterton.

MISS DALRYMPLE.

My William!

SIR GEORGE (*turning away*).

Damn!

MISS DALRYMPLE.

Oh, you are much worse than William. (*Pause*.) Miss Somerton seems better. My William has restored her.

[LORD WILLIAM *comes forward supporting*

MISS SOMERTON *on his arm*.

SIR GEORGE.

We are not wanted, evidently.

MISS DALRYMPLE.

I am very much wanted I think. I must protect William.

SIR GEORGE.

Nonsense, he is perfectly happy. Come back to the Den.

[*Tricks to lead her away*.

LORD WILLIAM (*flies after*).

Susan, Susan, I will not be left alone again.



A Drawing-Room Play.

MISS DALRYMPLE.

You seem to be getting on nicely without me, dear.

[Moves away.]

SIR GEORGE.

Miss Dalrymple is coming with me.

LORD WILLIAM.

Miss Dalrymple is staying with me.

SIR GEORGE.

Miss Dalrymple prefers to come with me.

LORD WILLIAM.

Miss Dalrymple stays with me when I desire it. Susan, I desire it.

MISS DALRYMPLE.

I think I should prefer to go with Sir George; we were having such a nice talk.

LORD WILLIAM.

Oh, were you? Well, you can continue it with me.

MISS DALRYMPLE.

Oh, you and I have already discussed the subjects.

LORD WILLIAM.

Which subjects?

MISS DALRYMPLE.

Love and marriage, dear.

LORD WILLIAM

(glaring at Sir George).

May I ask, sir, what business you have to discuss such subjects with my wife?

SIR GEORGE.

She is not your wife.

LORD WILLIAM.

She is going to be.

SIR GEORGE.

May I ask, sir, if that is the case, why I find you squeezing the hand of another lady?

LORD WILLIAM.

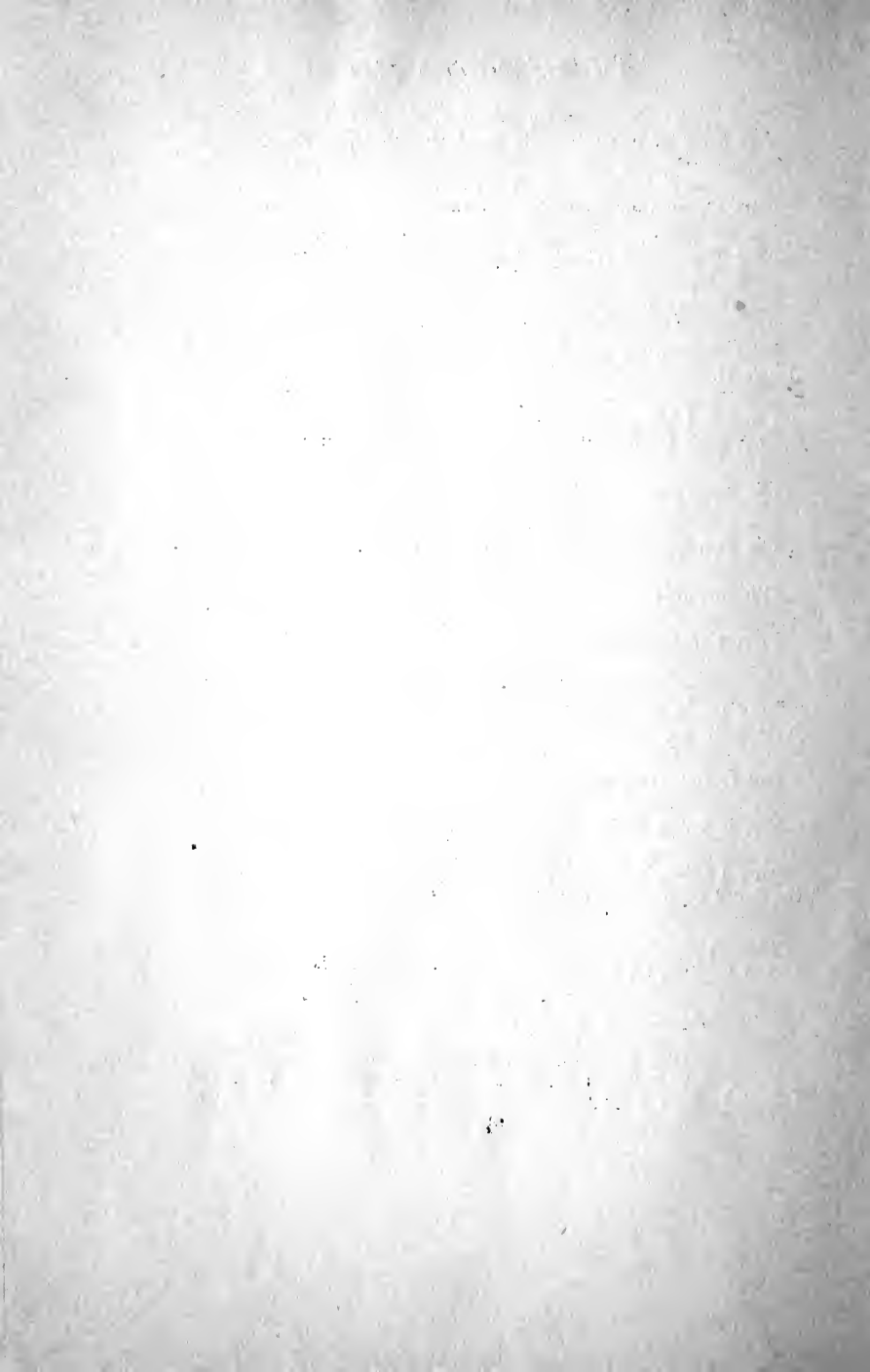
That was Miss Dalrymple's fault; she went away and flirted with you when she should have been looking after me.

SIR GEORGE.

Miss Dalrymple is incapable of flirting.

LORD WILLIAM *(bursting out laughing)*.

Bless my soul! this is another of Susan's admirers. *(Aside)* And how about Samuel, my nice young lady?



'On the Hire System:

(*Aloud*). Miss Dalrymple ought to be incapable of flirting, for she is engaged to me. Tell Sir George you don't care for any one's attentions but mine, my love.

MISS DALRYMPLE.

I don't want the attentions of either of you. Miss Somerton and I are going to have a chat.

[*Goes across the room, where MISS SOMERTON is arranging flowers.*]

MISS SOMERTON.

Hadn't you better go with Sir George? He seems to want it so much.

MISS DALRYMPLE.

And leave William with you? I couldn't trust him.

MISS SOMERTON.

Surely you cannot have much confidence in him.

MISS DALRYMPLE.

Oh, it is not he of whom I am afraid.

MISS SOMERTON.

Perhaps you had better let Sir George take him away, then there will be no danger of any mischief happening to any one.

MISS DALRYMPLE.

What a good idea! (*Calls*) William, neither you nor Sir George are wanted. You can go.

LORD WILLIAM.

I am all obedience, my darling. Come, George, the ladies don't want us. (*Moves to exit.*) After you.

SIR GEORGE.

Pray go on.

LORD WILLIAM.

I couldn't precede my guest.

SIR GEORGE.

I shouldn't like to leave you here.

LORD WILLIAM.

I must bid good-bye to Susan.

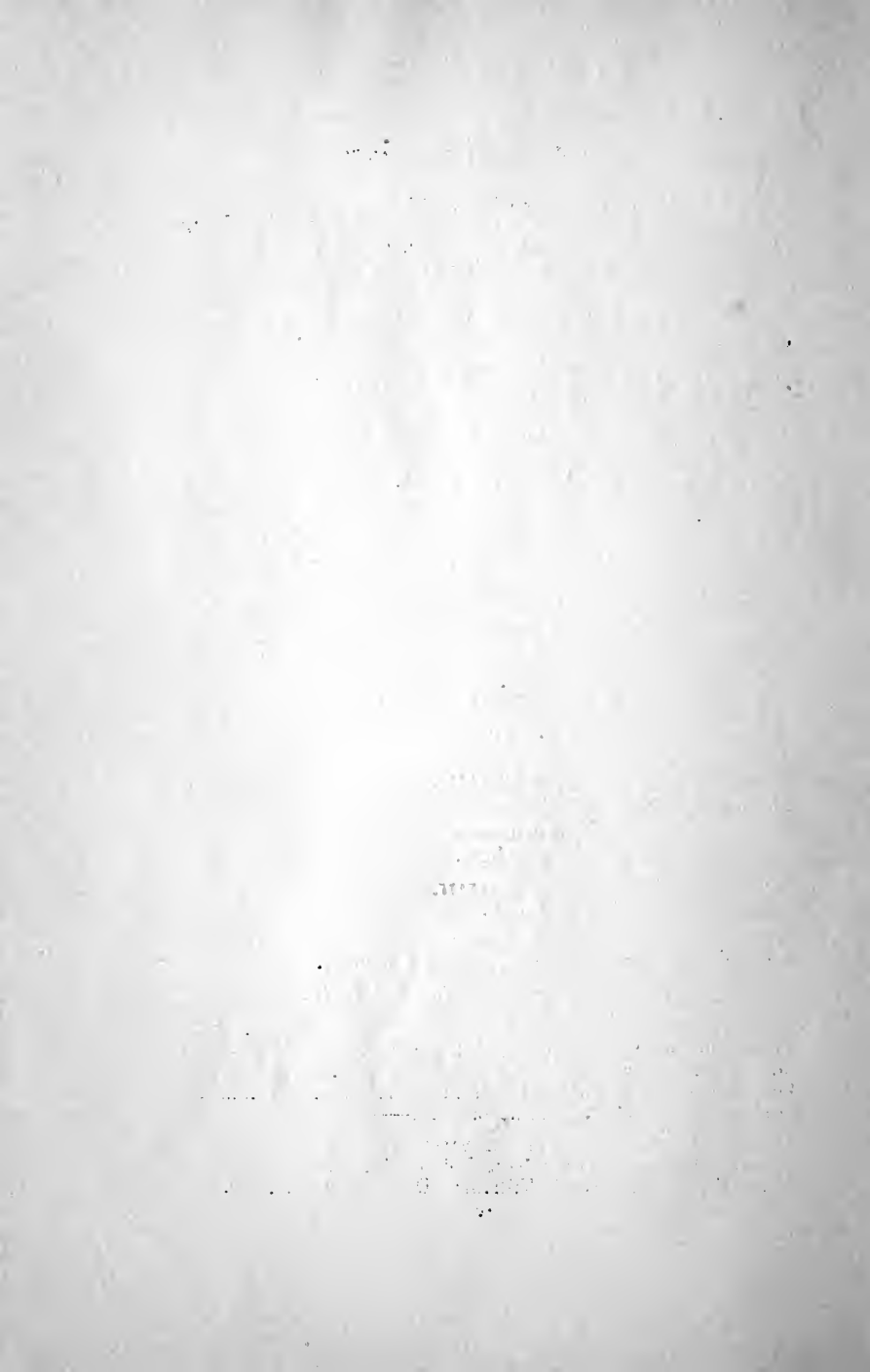
SIR GEORGE.

I can hardly go in so unceremonious a manner.

MISS DALRYMPLE (*stamping her foot*).

Will you go?

[*Shoving LORD WILLIAM out. Exit SIR GEORGE and LORD WILLIAM. MISS SOMERTON walks across room to MISS DALRYMPLE.*]



A Drawing-Room Play.

MISS SOMERTON.

Lord William does not seem inclined to leave Sir George behind, does he? Surely your engagement was very unexpected. I heard nothing of it before I came here.

MISS DALRYMPLE.

Well, perhaps it did seem unexpected to those who did not know us very well.

MISS SOMERTON.

But is it true?

MISS DALRYMPLE.

I cannot deny it.

MISS SOMERTON.

Have you known him long, may I ask?

MISS DALRYMPLE.

About six months.

MISS SOMERTON.

Six months! I have known him for years.

MISS DALRYMPLE.

Then you are in a position to tell me candidly what you think of him as a husband.

MISS SOMERTON.

I—I—it can hardly matter what I think of him in that capacity.

MISS DALRYMPLE.

One likes to hear what one can pick up of one's future husband, you see.

MISS SOMERTON.

I should hardly be bold enough to recommend him as a husband to you. I confess I cannot comprehend either of you. Your engagement seems so little serious.

MISS DALRYMPLE.

So little serious. Ah! how little you know us both.

MISS SOMERTON.

Lord William has a heart beneath all his nonsense, but it does not seem to me you care to touch it. Do you know (*rises and wrings her hands, walking up and down room*)—do you know anything of him really? Do you know him as I know him—I who have known him and cared for him for years—I who know him as no one else—

MISS DALRYMPLE.

Good Heavens! What have I done, Miss Somerton? Do you really care for Lord William? Does he care for you?

THE HISTORY OF THE
CITY OF BOSTON

FROM THE FIRST SETTLEMENT TO THE PRESENT TIME
BY SAMUEL JOHNSON, ESQ. OF BOSTON.

IN TWO VOLUMES.
THE FIRST VOLUME.
CONTAINING THE HISTORY FROM THE FIRST SETTLEMENT TO THE YEAR 1700.

THE SECOND VOLUME.
CONTAINING THE HISTORY FROM THE YEAR 1700 TO THE PRESENT TIME.

LONDON: Printed by J. BARNES, in Pall-mall, 1790.

BOSTON: Printed by S. KNEELAND, at the Sign of the Anchor, in the City.

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On the Hire System:

MISS SOMERTON (*agitated*).

What can it matter? You are to be his wife; surely it is cruel to ask. It matters nothing to you whose heart you break to become so.

MISS DALRYMPLE.

That is unfair. I never for a moment supposed you cared (*aside*), and I am dreadfully afraid William doesn't care a scrap for her. (*Aloud*) You seemed to care so much for society, and he doesn't, you know. Do you really think you have so much in common?

MISS SOMERTON.

Apparently not, since he cares for you.

MISS DALRYMPLE.

Oh, he doesn't care for me.

MISS SOMERTON.

Not care for you? But you are engaged.

MISS DALRYMPLE.

Yes—at present.

MISS SOMERTON.

Don't you care for him?

MISS DALRYMPLE (*starts up*).

We are diving too deeply into the mysteries of my engagement.

MISS SOMERTON.

If you don't love him, and he does not care for you, does it ever occur to you that you may be——

[*Buries her head and sobs.*]

MISS DALRYMPLE (*rushing at her*).

Miss Somerton! Good gracious! how awful! What can I do with her? Come away, come away, here's some one coming.

[*Drags her out of room.*]

Enter MISS DALRYMPLE and SIR GEORGE MARCHMONT by French window.

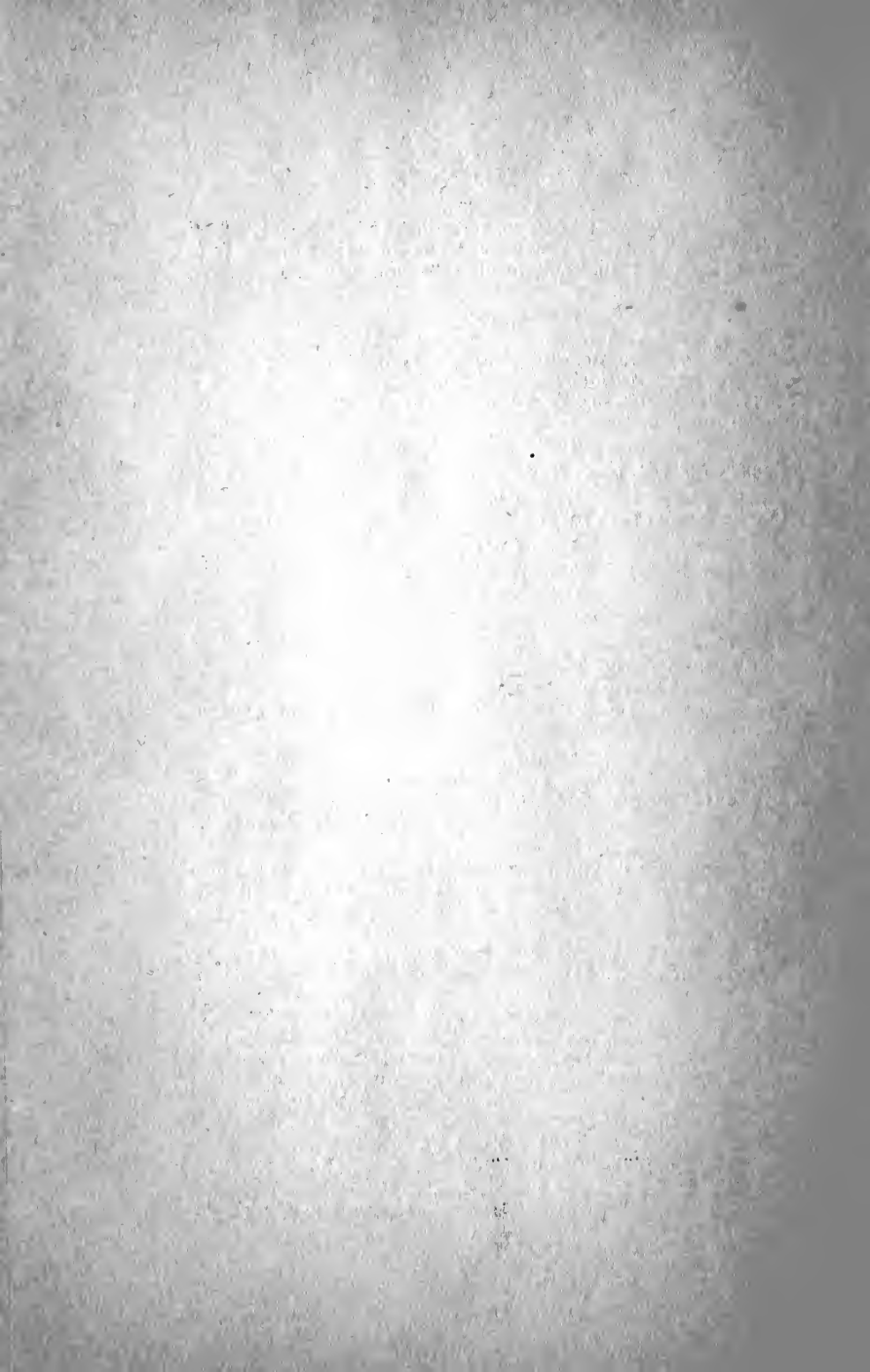
SIR GEORGE.

Well, I think you are rather hard on me, Miss Dalrymple. You tell me you are not going to marry Chesterton, and yet that you cannot marry any one else till your engagement with him is at an end. I confess I do not understand the arrangement with him very clearly.

MISS DALRYMPLE.

No, it is confusing. But if you like to ask Lord William to explain it, he has my permission.

[*Seats herself on sofa.*]



A Drawing-Room Play.

SIR GEORGE.

May I ask him? [Seats himself on arm behind.

MISS DALRYMPLE.

Certainly; but I don't think he is in the least likely to tell you.

SIR GEORGE.

I shall pin him down somehow.

[LORD WILLIAM'S voice behind.

LORD WILLIAM.

Susan! Susan!!

SIR GEORGE.

There he is.

Enter LORD WILLIAM.

MISS DALRYMPLE.

Oh, yes, wherever I am my charming lover is sure to be somewhere near, hovering over me.

LORD WILLIAM.

I have had such a hunt for you. You are quite forgetting your duties to me.

MISS DALRYMPLE.

My dear William, mayn't I have ten minutes for myself sometimes?

LORD WILLIAM.

You are not having ten minutes for yourself, Marchmont is having them. That is what I object to. You are always giving minutes to him. Come now, George, clear out, Miss Dalrymple is sick of you.

MISS DALRYMPLE.

Oh, no, not a bit. Sir George was just asking some particulars of our engagement, and I said you would furnish them.

LORD WILLIAM.

Oh, you did? Well, I shall not. George is of a prying nature. He is a deal too inquisitive. Why does he want to know? I expect he has been trying to ramper with your affections.

MISS DALRYMPLE.

Well, you wouldn't mind, would you?

LORD WILLIAM.

Not mind? Of course I mind. I want you to come to the smoking room and look at some diamond things that have come from town.



On the Hire System:

MISS DALRYMPLE.

I don't know anything about diamonds. Why do you want me to see them?

LORD WILLIAM.

They're for you. An engagement is nothing without diamonds.

[MISS DALRYMPLE rises. SIR GEORGE saunters out of French window.]

MISS DALRYMPLE.

Of course I can't take diamonds from you. I can't take anything but that amazing ring, which I shall return on my retirement from my duties.

LORD WILLIAM.

Not take them? Of course you must take them; even a savage hangs his squaw over with glass beads. You must have glass beads; no engagement is business-like without.

MISS DALRYMPLE.

So much the better, for I want to say that this stupid business must come to an end.

LORD WILLIAM.

Come to an end? It has just begun. It is doing beautifully. It is the best thing I have done for years.

MISS DALRYMPLE.

Well, it must come to an end.

LORD WILLIAM (*angrily*).

This is George's doing; but you won't find him so accommodating as I am. He won't go shares with Samuel.

MISS DALRYMPLE.

Oh, bother Samuel!

LORD WILLIAM.

That's what I said, and you snapped my head off. Well, George and Samuel won't work together as Samuel and I have worked. George is a jealous chap. I'm not a bit jealous, or I couldn't have stood Samuel.

MISS DALRYMPLE.

You have nothing to be jealous of.

LORD WILLIAM.

(*walks up and down rather excitedly*).

I might be jealous of George, but I'm not. But I command you not to dance more than twice this evening with George. I will not have false hopes encouraged in George.

Book

A Drawing-Room Play.

MISS DALRYMPLE

(laying her hand on LORD WILLIAM'S arm).

I wish you to understand that this insane arrangement must come to an end. I have no business to pretend I am engaged to you. It is making other people needlessly unhappy.

LORD WILLIAM.

It is making me quite happy and comfortable.

MISS DALRYMPLE.

Perhaps; but we must consider the feelings of others.

LORD WILLIAM. *(quickly).*

Whose? George's?

MISS DALRYMPLE. *(angrily, starting away from him).*
Every one's.

LORD WILLIAM.

You mean George's. George isn't a bit suited to you. He has a beastly temper. I will not give you up to make George happy.

MISS DALRYMPLE. *(walking up and down angrily).*
I was not thinking of Sir George.

LORD WILLIAM.

Oh, you need not think of Samuel. He seems accommodating enough.

MISS DALRYMPLE.

I was not thinking of Samuel.

LORD WILLIAM.

I knew it. George has been worming himself in behind my back. *(Leaning on back of sofa and bringing his hand down angrily on it.)* I will not have George for my rival. He is my best friend, and I know he would make a beastly husband. You will be good enough to avoid George in future. He is not a nice friend for you.

MISS DALRYMPLE.

Well, I have warned you our arrangement comes to an end to-night. I will keep it up till to-morrow morning, and I shall leave then.

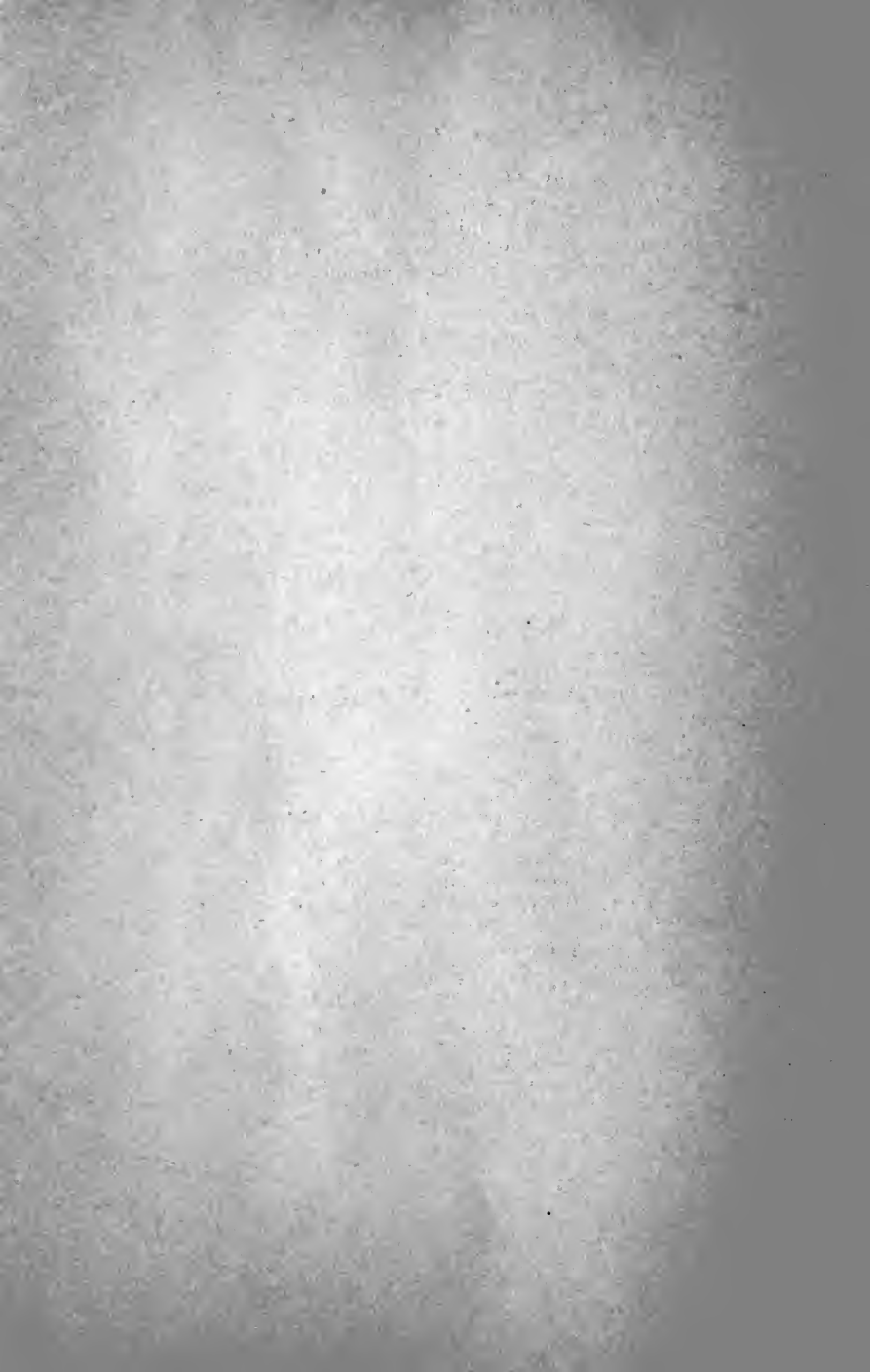
LORD WILLIAM.

To visit George's relations, no doubt.

*[Furiously strides across the room
and catches her by the arm.]*

MISS DALRYMPLE. *(coldly).*

To visit any one I please.



On the Hire System:

LORD WILLIAM

(takes her hand and draws her to centre of room).

You shall not. You shall become engaged in all seriousness to me.

MISS DALRYMPLE. *(shrugging her shoulders).*

Oh dear no, you are embarrassing enough now, but you would be appalling then; besides, you forget there is Samuel.

LORD WILLIAM.

Damn Samuel!

MISS DALRYMPLE. *(tearing her hand away).*

Thank you very much. I am going.

LORD WILLIAM.

Oh, go! Go to George! *(Stamps.)* And what about the glass beads.

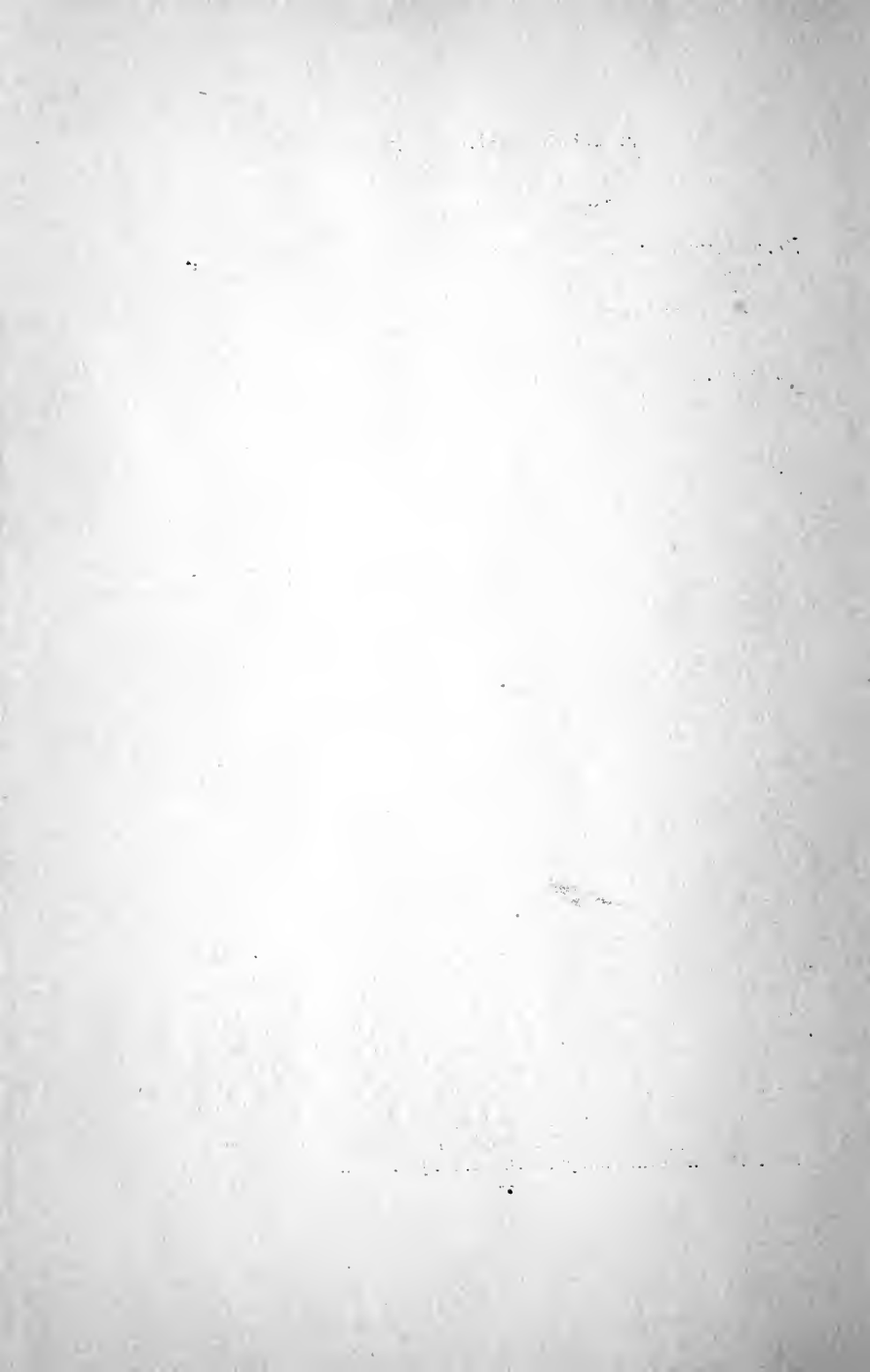
MISS DALRYMPLE.

You can give them to me when I marry George . . . *(going out and looking over shoulder)* or Samuel! *[Exit.]*

LORD WILLIAM.

(Soliloquy. Strolling across the room and sitting on back of sofa).

After all, getting engaged isn't so nice as I expected. I am falling damnably in love with little Susan, and I am on the verge of quarrelling with my best friend. *Cherchez la femme!* It's always the woman. If Susan hadn't suggested that she wanted to get away from home. . . . but of course I have to take all the risks. Poor little Susan. Yes, I am really in love with Susan. She's a shocking little flirt, but she suits me, Susan does, and she doesn't care a twopenny rushlight for me. . . . heartless little wretch. And then there's Samuel. I wonder how she means to square Samuel after this. I don't care—I don't want her to square Samuel. I want her to marry me. *(Rising and walking about, head down and hands in his pockets.)* I am a much better match for her than Samuel. Samuel wouldn't make her a good husband. Samuel has an Indian liver. He pegs. Samuel orders her about as if she was a nigger. I won't have my little Susan treated like a nigger. *(Excitedly.)* No, she's Samuel's little Susan. Hang Samuel! He's a bilious beast. He's as yellow as an orange. Susan shall *not* marry Samuel, it would be profanity. My little Susan—my own nice little, dear little Susan. I must go and look for Susan.



A Drawing-Room Play.

SCENE III.—*Same room.*

Enter LADY GWENDOLEN, MISS SOMERTON, and MISS DALRYMPLE in full evening dress. MISS DALRYMPLE carries gorgeous shower bouquet. LADY GWENDOLEN and MISS DALRYMPLE cross room together.

LADY GWEN.

I am afraid you will find William's eccentricities rather difficult to endure, Susan, but perhaps you are sufficiently modern to prefer excitement to happiness.

MISS DALRYMPLE.

At all events, I do not expect our home life to be dull. Dear William is full of delightful surprises.

LADY GWEN.

His latest surprise is that he is jealous. (*Laughs.*) William jealous? It is too funny, but it is very good for him, You should keep it up. It may be the saving of him; he is far too much accustomed to have everything he wants. Every one has drooped into his mouth hitherto, haven't they, Blanche?

MISS SOMERTON. (*coming from fireplace*).

How should I know, dear? I never had anything to do with Lord William's mouth.

LADY GWEN.

No. [*Smiles meaningly.*]

MISS SOMERTON.

Nor do I know how much he can swallow.

LADY GWEN.

He has swallowed Susan, for which Heaven be thanked.

MISS DALRYMPLE.

Thank you very much, dear lady Gwen.

LADY GWEN.

Oh, you don't know how frightened I have been. At one time I was even afraid he would marry a New Woman.

MISS DALRYMPLE.

Oh, he wouldn't have a chance with a New Woman—he is not depraved enough. He would have no interest for her.

MISS SOMERTON.

Don't you approve of New Women?

MISS DALRYMPLE.

Yes, as I approve of north winds and carbolic acid; I think they serve the same purpose and are equally disagreeable.

On the Hire System:

LADY GWEN.

What a heavenly bouquet, dear! William has distinguished himself.

MISS DALRYMPLE.

Oh, this is not his—Sir George gave it me.

LADY GWEN.

Did William forget?

MISS DALRYMPLE.

No; but I liked this one the best.

MISS SOMERTON.

Lord William will be very angry.

MISS DALRYMPLE.

Well, he will have to recover himself.

MISS SOMERTON.

Are you not afraid of his being angry?

MISS DALRYMPLE.

Not a bit.

MISS SOMERTON.

I think you like to wound him.

MISS DALRYMPLE.

I delight in it, don't you?

[Goes across room and admires herself in glass.]

MISS SOMERTON. *(following)*.

No, I should not like to give him a minute's uneasiness.

MISS DALRYMPLE.

Oh, shouldn't you? I give him hours.

MISS SOMERTON.

I should not like to make any one I loved unhappy.

MISS DALRYMPLE.

Oh, but I don't love him—at least I love him too much to spoil his character by pampering his weaknesses.

MISS SOMERTON.

He has none.

[Tragically and enthusiastically.]

MISS DALRYMPLE *(bursts out laughing)*.

Ha—ha—ha—ha! No weak points, ha—ha—ha! Why, he's all weak points together, that is why he amuses me so.
[Sits down on sofa.]

MISS SOMERTON.

Amuses you?

MISS DALRYMPLE.

Yes, immensely. Doesn't William amuse you?

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'A Drawing-Room Play.

MISS SOMERTON.

Never.

MISS DALRYMPLE.

Perhaps you find it difficult to feel amused. Oh, here they come. *[Jumps up.]*

LORD WILLIAM and SIR GEORGE enter.

MISS DALRYMPLE.

Now you will see one of dear William's weak spots. *(Goes quickly across the room to SIR GEORGE.)* Oh, dear Sir George, what a lovely bouquet you have sent me! I never saw anything lovelier. *[Sniffs it appreciatingly.]*

SIR GEORGE *(with pleased smile)*.

I am honoured by your accepting it.

[Goes across to MISS SOMERTON and sits beside her.]

LORD WILLIAM *(angrily)*.

Is that George's bouquet?

MISS DALRYMPLE.

Yes, dearest.

LORD WILLIAM.

Did you not receive mine?

MISS DALRYMPLE.

Yes, dearest.

LORD WILLIAM.

Why are you not wearing it?

MISS DALRYMPLE.

Because I liked his best, dear William.

LORD WILLIAM.

Would you be good enough to send for mine?

MISS DALRYMPLE.

Why, dearest?

LORD WILLIAM.

Because you are engaged to me, not to Sir George.

MISS DALRYMPLE.

Oh, I don't think our very slight engagement counts in such matters, and this is such a lovely bouquet.

LORD WILLIAM.

So was mine I hope.

MISS DALRYMPLE.

Hum—moderately.

LORD WILLIAM.

At any rate I wish you to wear it; will you send for it?

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On the Hire System:

MISS DALRYMPLE.

No, dearest.

LORD WILLIAM.

Then I shall.

[*Crosses room and rings.*]

MISS DALRYMPLE.

By all means, my love.

LORD WILLIAM (*returning to her side*).

I am determined you shall wear my bouquet to-night; not Marchmont's.

MISS DALRYMPLE.

Dearest, this is a free country. Have you ever heard of the Magna Charta?

Enter Footman. LORD WILLIAM *signs to him.*

LORD WILLIAM.

(*Footman crosses room*).

Tell Miss Dalrymple's maid to give you the bouquet I sent for her.

FOOTMAN.

Yes, my lord.

[*Exit.*]

MISS DALRYMPLE.

You are quite determined, dearest.

LORD WILLIAM.

Quite.

MISS DALRYMPLE.

No compromise?

[*Silence.*]

Re-enter Footman with bouquet exactly matching in flowers
MISS DALRYMPLE's dress.

MISS DALRYMPLE.

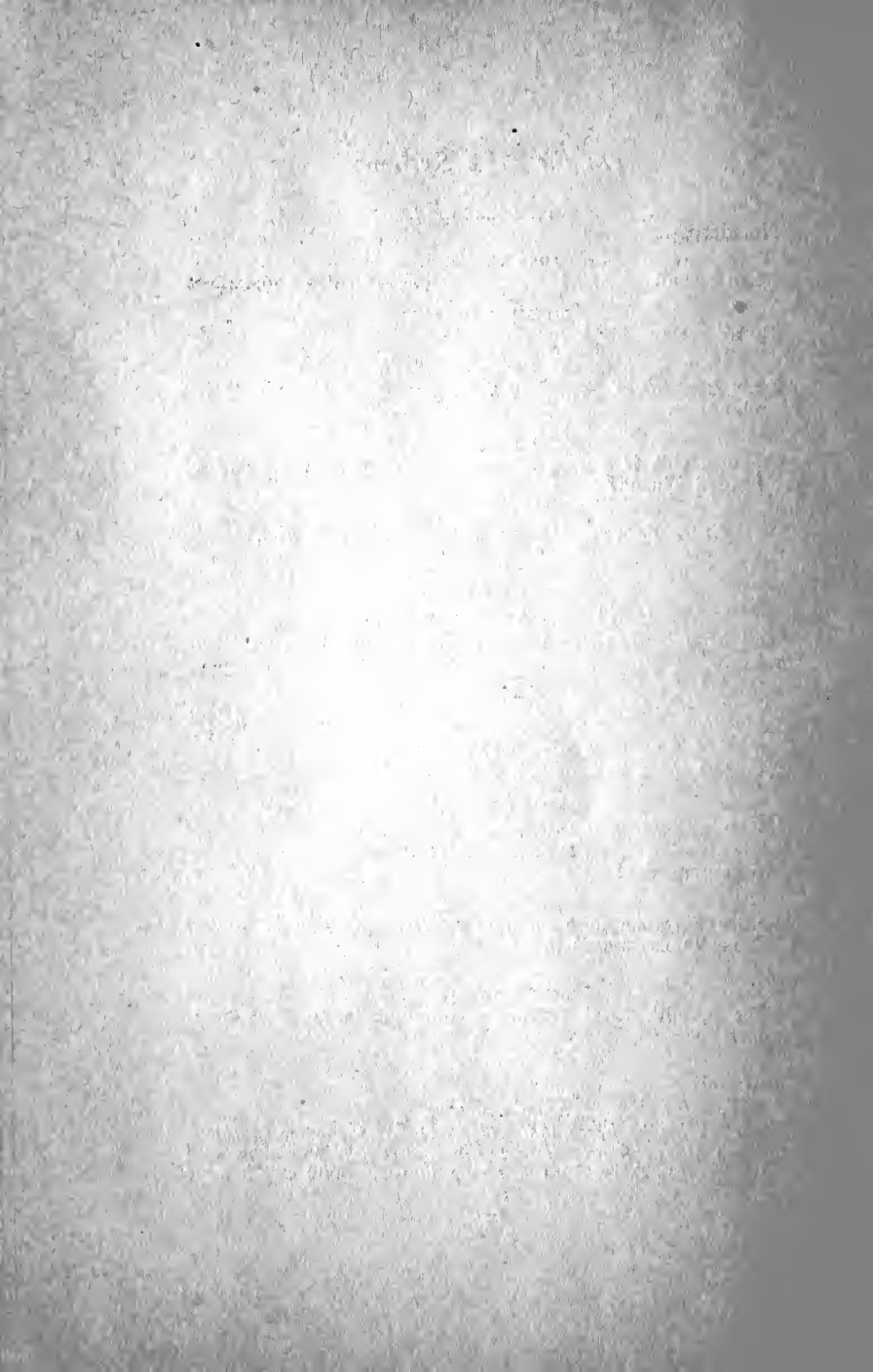
Take it, with Lord William's compliments, to Miss Somerton.

FOOTMAN.

Yes, miss.

LORD WILLIAM.

Stop. (*Grasps her hand and takes SIR GEORGE's bouquet, dropping it on floor. Takes his own from Footman and thrusts it into MISS DALRYMPLE's hand*). You shall wear mine.



A Drawing-Room Play.

MISS DALRYMPLE.

How dare you? (*Stands gazing at him, then crosses to* MISS SOMERTON). Miss Somerton, it seems the bouquet Lord William intended for you came to me by—mistake. I am so sorry. [*Hands it to* MISS SOMERTON.

MISS SOMERTON (*clasping it*).

How lovely! Oh, how much too good of you, Lord William! (*Aside*) I was sure he liked me best really.

MISS DALRYMPLE (*crossing room again and pointing to the floor*).

My bouquet, please.

LORD WILLIAM.

If you wear it I will break every bone in Marchmont's body.

MISS DALRYMPLE.

Pooh! Don't be stupid.

LORD WILLIAM.

And I will make you repent it to the last day of your life.

MISS DALRYMPLE.

How alarming! We are going in to dinner now.

LORD WILLIAM.

You will find you cannot play fast and loose with **two men** at the same time.

MISS DALRYMPLE.

Three, dear; you forget Samuel.

LORD WILLIAM.

Dozens probably. *You forget yourself and me.*

MISS DALRYMPLE.

Oh, William, dear, how naughty you make me! (*Giggles.*) I am waiting for my bouquet, and Miss Somerton is waiting to be taken to dinner.

LORD WILLIAM.

You shall be sorry for it, madam.

[*Stalks off to* MISS SOMERTON. *MISS DALRYMPLE picks up bouquet and walks off.*
SIR GEORGE follows with LADY GWEN.

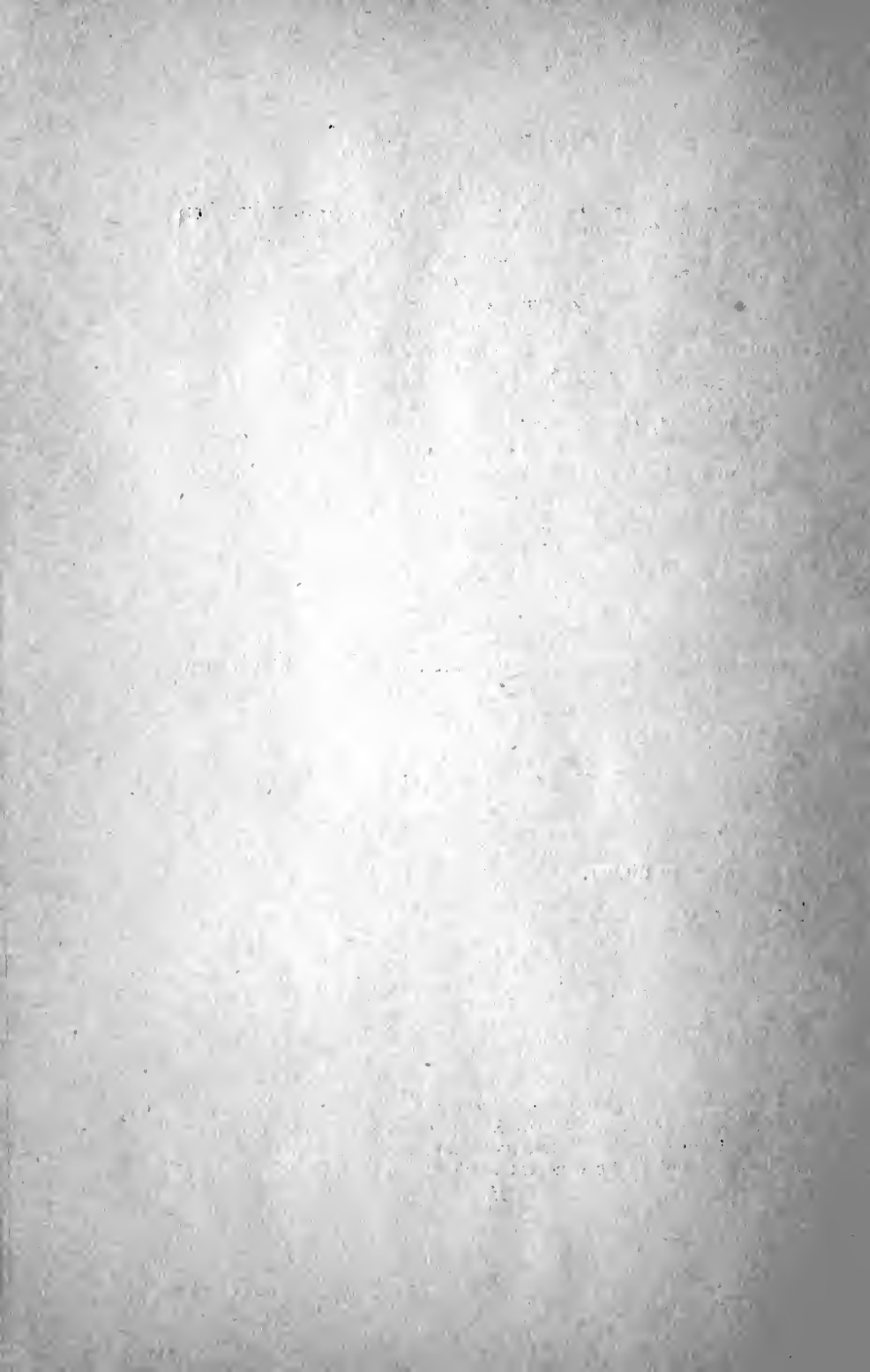
Re-enter SIR GEORGE and LORD WILLIAM, *talking as they enter.*

LORD WILLIAM.

I should esteem it a favour, George, if you would not make love to Miss Dalrymple when she is to be my wife.

SIR GEORGE.

She will not be your wife; she told me so herself.



On the Hire System :

LORD WILLIAM.

Oh, she did, did she? Well, you must have mistaken her meaning, for she is engaged to me.

SIR GEORGE.

I do not believe it.

LORD WILLIAM.

Oh, I lie, do I?

SIR GEORGE.

I think it quite possible.

LORD WILLIAM.

We will arrange that part of it presently; meantime you would believe the lady's word, I suppose.

SIR GEORGE.

I would believe Miss Dalrymple in everything.

LORD WILLIAM.

You would,—she is fortunate.

SIR GEORGE.

I would.

LORD WILLIAM.

Then I shall convince you easily. Be good enough to remain here while I fetch Miss Dalrymple.

[Leaves the room. SIR GEORGE goes up to mirror and arranges his moustache.]

Re-enter MISS DALRYMPLE and LORD WILLIAM. MISS DALRYMPLE crosses room to SIR GEORGE.

MISS DALRYMPLE.

Lord William said you wanted me.

SIR GEORGE.

It was Lord William's wish entirely. I beg you will believe that I was not guilty of the impertinence of sending for you, Miss Dalrymple.

LORD WILLIAM.

No; but he will profit by your accidental presence. Sir George seems to be labouring under a misunderstanding, which I must ask you to remove for him.

MISS DALRYMPLE.

Certainly.

[Looks from one to the other.]

LORD WILLIAM.

I am sorry to have to allude to perfectly private matters, but Sir George insists. Did you not agree, about five weeks ago, may I ask, to become engaged to me?



A Drawing-Room Play.

MISS DALRYMPLE.

Yes.

LORD WILLIAM.

Did you not swear, when I proposed that you should become engaged to me, that all other claims should be disregarded but mine?

MISS DALRYMPLE.

Yes, but——

[*Agitatedly.*]

LORD WILLIAM.

Stay. (*Holds up hand.*) Was not our engagement made independent of your affections and for our mutual interests?

MISS DALRYMPLE.

You are putting it unfairly.

LORD WILLIAM.

I am putting it truthfully. Was it not exactly as I have said?

MISS DALRYMPLE.

Yes, but you forget——

LORD WILLIAM.

I forget nothing. It is you who have forgotten.

MISS DALRYMPLE.

You have forgotten to say that I never promised to marry you.

LORD WILLIAM.

Sir George will believe that or not as he pleases. An engagement, an oath, even a lady's is not lightly taken about a small matter, he will understand. (*To SIR GEORGE*) Are you satisfied?

SIR GEORGE.

Less than ever.

LORD WILLIAM.

You believe we are *both* lying, then? In Miss Dalrymple's name and my own I thank you.

SIR GEORGE.

I believe you have manœuvred Miss Dalrymple into some devilish arrangement to suit your own selfishness, which she cannot get out of without breaking some stupid sort of oath that you have dodged her into.

LORD WILLIAM.

You believe we are both lying? You dare to say to me that Miss Dalrymple, my affianced wife, is lying? You obstinate devil!

[*Springs at him. MISS DALRYMPLE steps in between and stretches out her arms to LORD WILLIAM.*]



On the Hire System:

MISS DALRYMPLE.

Oh, William, William, for heaven's sake for my sake!
[*Staggered and falls into his arms.* SIR
GEORGE *springs forward.* LORD WILLIAM
*tears him away, and carries her across
the room.*

LORD WILLIAM.

Stand back, sir. No one touches Miss Dalrymple but myself.

SCENE IV.—*Same room.*

Enter LADY GWEN, and LORD WILLIAM.

LADY GWEN.

Yes, I think the ball was a great success. Every one must have thought you a lucky man, for I never saw anything lovelier than Susan. Generally she has too little colour, but last night she had the loveliest colour I ever saw.

LORD WILLIAM.

She might well blush. She was making George's head go round and round with vanity by making love to him openly.

LADY GWEN.

I hope not. I thought her enchanting, and in such spirits. I am glad I thought of having the dance, she seemed to enjoy it so much.

LORD WILLIAM.

I have no doubt she did. So did George. I didn't. It was beastly selfish of George.

LADY GWEN.

It is perfectly delightful to see you in earnest at last. (*Laughs.*) Jealous! You jealous! Well, Billy, we must allow that you have conscientiously earned your turn of it.

LORD WILLIAM.

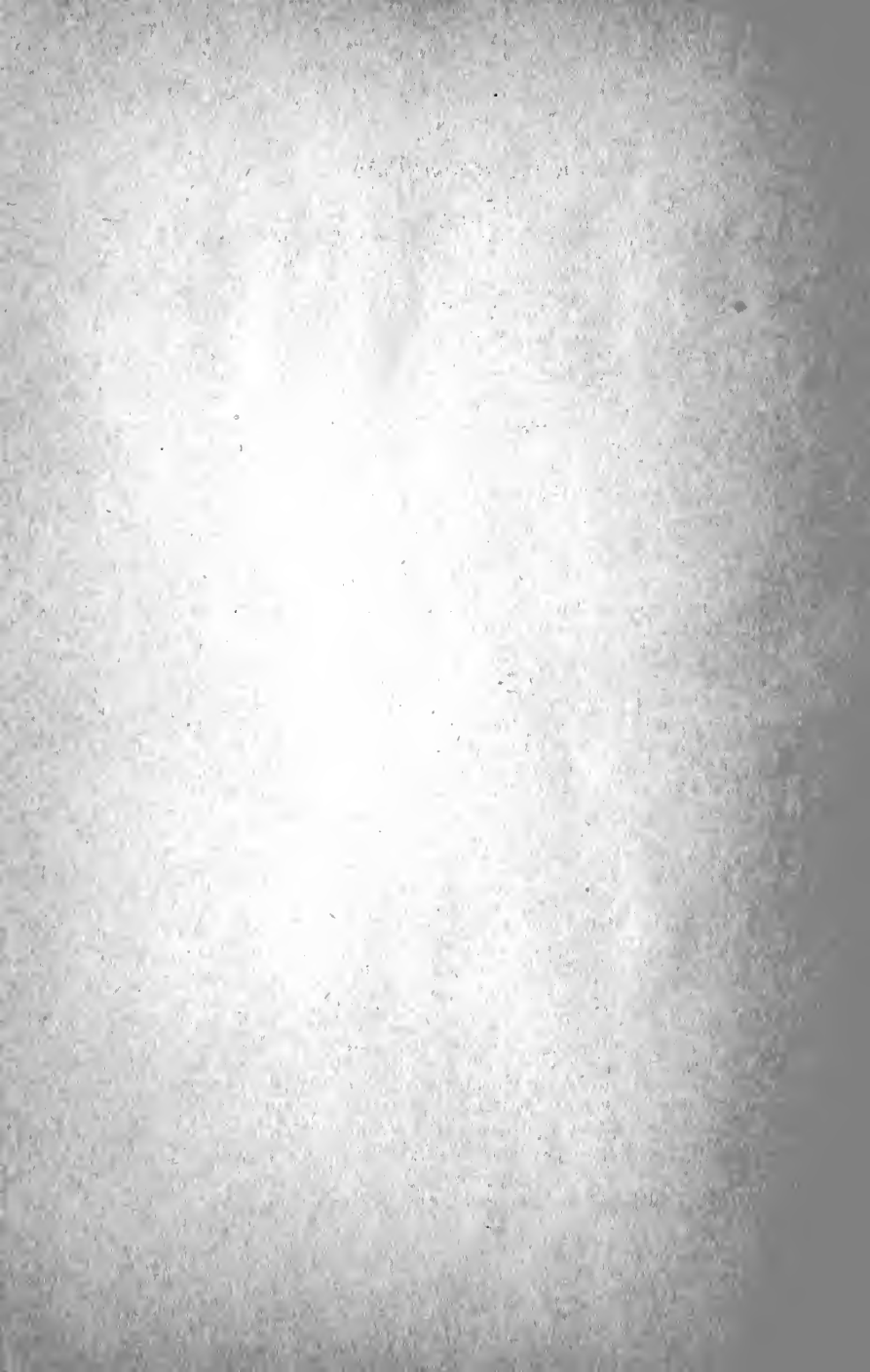
What became of George? I never saw him after supper.

LADY GWEN. (*sitting down*).

Oh, George isn't a dancing man, I suppose he retired to the smoking-room. I am afraid Susan must be very tired—I have seen nothing of her this morning. (*Enter Footman.*) Ask Miss Dalrymple's maid whether Miss Dalrymple is rested, and whether she will be down at lunch time.

FOOTMAN.

Miss Dalrymple and her maid left this morning, my lady.



A Drawing-Room Play.

LADY GWEN.

Left this morning? Nonsense. Ask Sir George Marchmont——

FOOTMAN.

Sir George left last night, my lady.

LADY GWEN.

Last night? Impossible! William, did you know that Susan and Sir George had left. [Exit Footman.

LORD WILLIAM

(*stands still as if struck.*)

Left? Susan and Sir George?

LADY GWEN.

Yes, so it seems. Did you know?

LORD WILLIAM (*dully*).

I know nothing. I wasn't likely to know, was I, if Susan and Marchmont were going away together?

LADY GWEN.

What are you thinking of? Sir George left last night it seems. Did you know he was going?

LORD WILLIAM.

Am I Sir George's keeper?

LADY GWEN.

He must have been ill or something. I thought he did not look well when we left the dining-room. Did you notice anything the matter?

LORD WILLIAM.

I? Oh, no—nothing.

LADY GWEN.

He did not seem ill.

LORD WILLIAM.

He seemed *unusually* robust and lively.

LADY GWEN.

I must go and see about it all. Susan must have left a message; perhaps her mother was ill. [Exit.

LORD WILLIAM (*rings bell hastily*).

Susan gone—and George. I should like to know what this means. (*Re-enter Footman.*) Did Miss Dalrymple leave no message for me, John?

FOOTMAN.

A letter, my lord.

LORD WILLIAM.

Confound you, then, why don't you give it me, you fool.

FOOTMAN.

I put it on your study table, my lord.



On the Hire System:

LORD WILLIAM.

Then be good enough to fetch it. *[Exit FOOTMAN.]*

LORD WILLIAM *(walking up and down)*.

So she has so much consideration, the little fiend. I wonder what she has to say for herself. *(Re-enter FOOTMAN with letter or salver)*. Thank you, you can go. Susan's first letter to her William. I never saw little Susan's hand before. She writes a nice hand, like herself, the little wretch. *(Kisses the letter and opens it, sits and reads:)*—

"After your rudeness before dinner last night and your catechism afterwards for Sir George's benefit, you can hardly expect that I should keep up any more fictions for the protection of yourself or your fortune. I return home to-day. If we should ever meet again in society, which I hope we never may, we meet as strangers.

"SUSAN DALRYMPLE."

No, we don't, Susan—we can't—we shan't. I couldn't do it, little woman. You shall make me crawl up and down London on all-fours if you like, but speak to me you shall, and love me you must. I swear it, Susan—and my oath is as good as yours any day. I will not be put aside. *(Stands up and gazes at the letter.)* I swear I will not give you up.

SCENE V.—*Same room.*

LADY GWEN, *sitting by fire*. LORD WILLIAM *stalking up and down room*.

Enter Miss SOMERTON, in walking dress.

MISS SOMERTON.

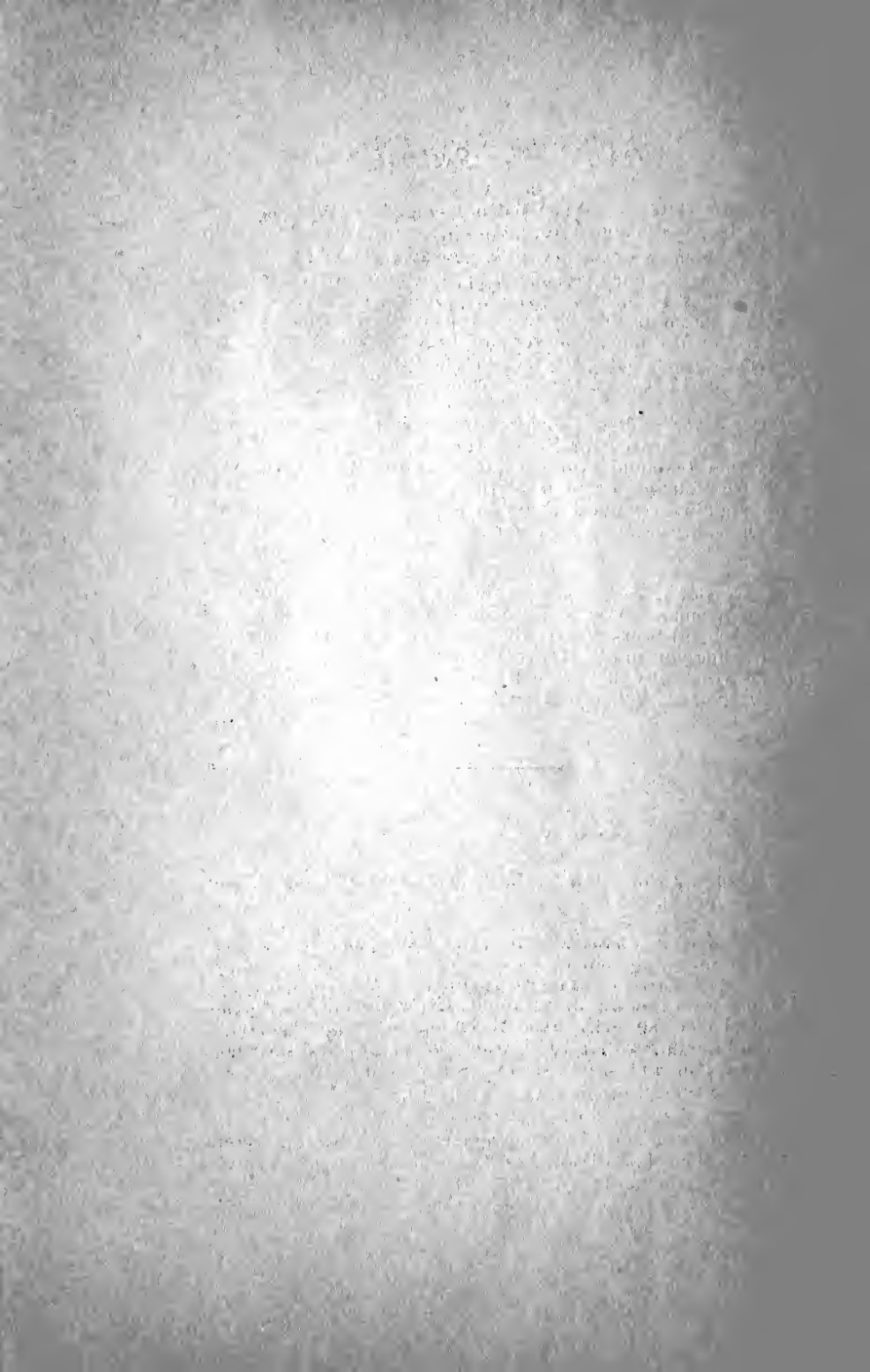
I am glad to find you at home. Now do tell me of this delightful new scandal. And it happened from your house when we were all there. How clever of you both to keep it so quiet!

LADY GWEN, *(coldly)*.

Is there a new scandal?

MISS SOMERTON.

Why, you ought to know best, since it was from this house Miss Dalrymple ran away.



A Drawing-Room Play.

LADY GWEN.

Miss Dalrymple? Why, she is engaged to William.

MISS SOMERTON.

That is just what makes it so interesting.

LORD WILLIAM.

Pshaw! Who in the world invented such a cock-and-bull story about Susan?

MISS SOMERTON.

I don't think she ever *really* cared for you.

LORD WILLIAM (*seating himself*).

That is quite true. I object to being loved.

MISS SOMERTON.

How immoral! Of course, a girl who can engage herself for money is capable of anything.

LORD WILLIAM (*angrily*).

It was not for my money. It was for my defence, and to get away from Honolulu.

LADY GWEN.

My dear William, do pull yourself together and don't talk nonsense.

MISS SOMERTON.

From where?

LORD WILLIAM.

Honolulu. Susan and I understand each other perfectly. She wishes to get away from Honolulu shirts—I want to get away from British petticoats. It was all square. It was more. (*Proudly*) It was brilliant!

MISS SOMERTON.

But why did she run away?

LORD WILLIAM.

She did not run away. She can't run away. She stands between me and petticoats, and I stand between her and scratchy shirts. We are going to found a society to prevent the trapping of innocent bachelors. We mean to be even with the designing female. Susan and I have master-minds; we do master-strokes. Our engagement was a master-stroke. If it had not been for meddling fools we should have undermined two crying evils—the British matron and the quality of Honolulu shirts—but, of course, inquisitive asses must poke their noses in and scare Susan. She is quite upset. I will *not* have Susan upset.

MISS SOMERTON.

Well, this is as good as the elopement. Are you really going to marry Miss Dalrymple?

On the Hire System:

LORD WILLIAM.

Of course. She will protect me from matrimony. She is to ward off promiscuous attentions. I am ashamed of your sex—they make me blush. I must be protected from blushing.

MISS SOMERTON.

Then you don't mind her having run off with Sir George?

LORD WILLIAM (*bounding up*).

She never ran away with Sir George. Go and see for yourself.

MISS SOMERTON (*rising*).

Oh dear no, thank you. Miss Dalrymple will not find many people to call on her now.

LORD WILLIAM.

My sister does.

MISS SOMERTON (*coldly*).

Does she?

LORD WILLIAM (*angrily*).

And all my friends will have to.

LADY GWEN, (*rising and going towards them*).

Perhaps Miss Somerton will join our party for Henley next week. She will surely not refuse to see Miss Dalrymple under my roof.

LORD WILLIAM (*furiously*).

She will not be asked to do so by me.

LADY GWEN, (*aside*).

She's dying to come. (*Aloud*) We shall be delighted if you will do so. Miss Somerton, shan't we, William?

LORD WILLIAM (*aside*).

Oh, she's dying to come, is she? Well, I don't know whether Susan will care to meet her. Susan is very particular.

LADY GWEN.

William and I will take no refusal. (*Aside*) Say something civil.

MISS SOMERTON.

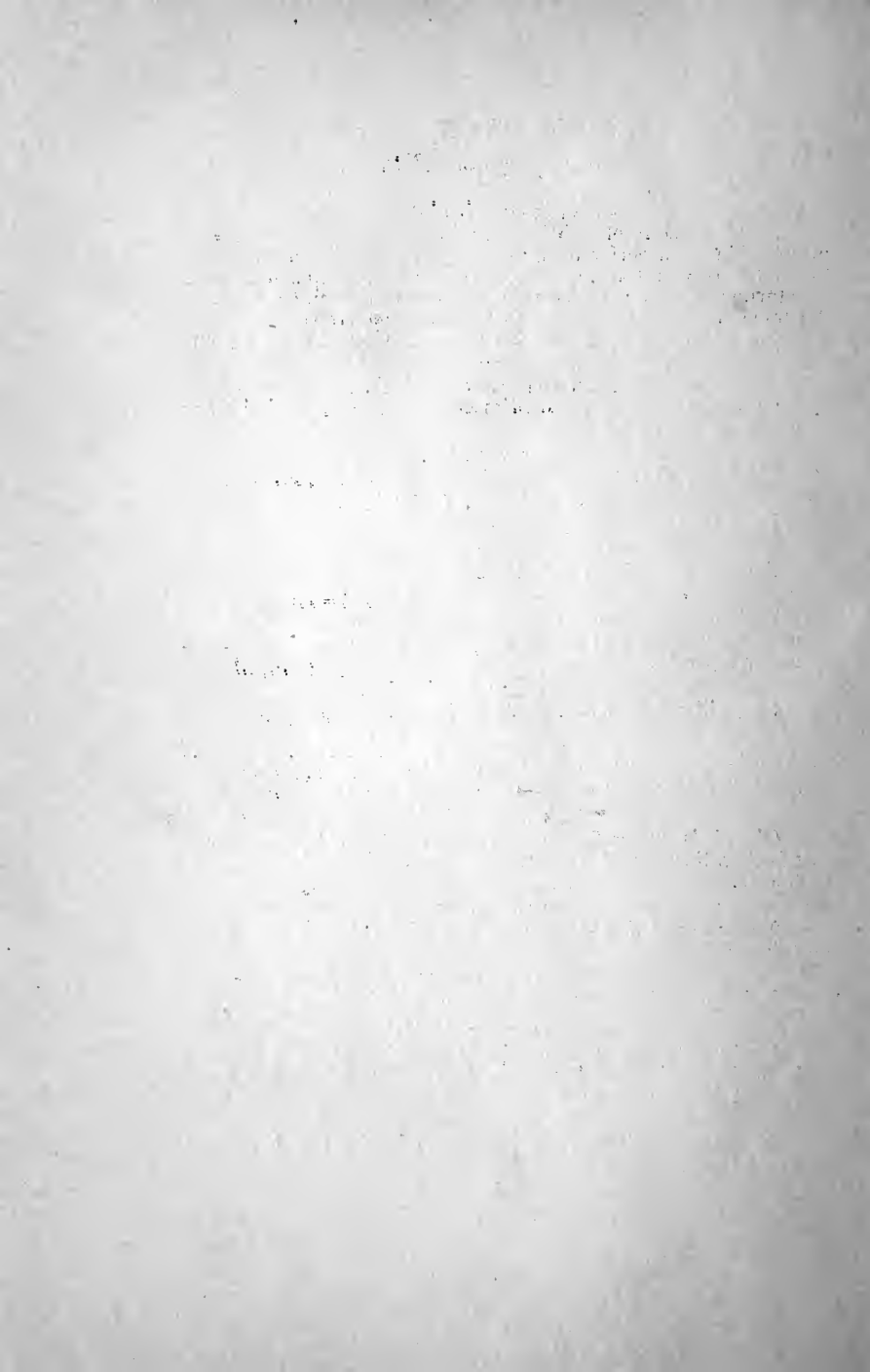
It is most kind of you; I shall be delighted.

LORD WILLIAM (*aside*).

I will not. She is a gossiping wretch. (*Aloud*) It must be understood, Miss Somerton, that I will not hear a word against Miss Dalrymple.

MISS SOMERTON.

Oh, of course if you really mean to forgive her, it is most wise of you



A Drawing-Room Play.

LORD WILLIAM (*firmly*).

It is only honourable. Miss Dalrymple needs no screening by me. She is a perfectly upright woman. I have no doubt the virtue is so rarely practised that you have a difficulty in recognising it—(*aside*) especially as you know nothing about it personally. (*Aside to his sister*) Take me away—I shall do this woman an injury.

LADY GWEN.

Then we shall count on your being of our party. (*Aside*) You goose, she will say *devilish* things of Susan if you aren't civil.

LORD WILLIAM (*affably*).

I am sure you ought to come, if only to satisfy your curiosity. (*Aside*) I will *not* be civil.

MISS SOMERTON.

Oh, as you insist, dear friends—

LADY GWEN.

Of course we do. William insists, I insist—don't you, William?

LORD WILLIAM.

I insist.

[*Emphatically.*]

LADY GWEN.

You must be sure to come. Till the 5th, then, good-bye.

LORD WILLIAM (*aside*).

Offer her a diamond or two. She'll come like a lamb then. (*Loud*) Good-bye, I hope Susan will consent to come *now*.

[*Exit.*]

MISS SOMERTON (*Soliloquy. Angrily pacing to door of room*).

Insolent brute! Well, I shall go. As Lord William seems bent on marrying the woman, one may as well recognise her after a fashion. (*Loud*) Well, good-bye, dear Lady Gwen. It is so wise of you to humour Lord William in the meantime, and the only way to choke him off marrying her. Of course, for your dear boy's sake, it is most undesirable that he should marry any one, isn't it? [*Exit.*]

LADY GWEN.

Good-bye, dear Miss Somerton. (*Stamps.*) Oh, you horrid, gossip-mongering, squalid pig!

L. of C.

the first of these is the fact that the history of the world is a history of the progress of the human mind.

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The eighteenth is the fact that the history of the world is a history of the progress of the human mind.

On the Hire System:

SCENE VI.—*Same room.*

Enter MISS DALRYMPLE, who walks up and down touching things affectionately. Enter LORD WILLIAM.

MISS DALRYMPLE.

How nice it is to be back again. Here's William. How do you do, Lord William. (*LORD WILLIAM holds out his hand with his head turned away.*) Oh, I forgot. There was a stipulation that if I came back you were not to speak to nor look at me except in public, wasn't there?

[*LORD WILLIAM nods and prepares to go out.*

MISS DALRYMPLE.

Oh! don't go. I shan't mind you. Couldn't you say "Yes" and "No?" That would commit neither of us to anything, would it?

[*LORD WILLIAM stands sideways and shakes his head.*

MISS DALRYMPLE.

How tiresome you are? Perhaps you think you have said enough already.

[*Silence. MISS DALRYMPLE walks about and pulls out her gown, arranging lace, &c.*

MISS DALRYMPLE.

Oh, by-the-bye, do you think I ought to confess to Samuel? I couldn't make up my mind.

[*LORD WILLIAM turns away.*

MISS DALRYMPLE.

Well, you *are* a cheerful companion. Perhaps you have more to say to Miss Somerton. Well, go off to her.

[*LORD WILLIAM prepares to go. MISS DALRYMPLE runs after him and lays hand on his arm, drags him back.*

MISS DALRYMPLE.

No, don't. I don't wish you to go to her. She'll tell you all sorts of horrid things that aren't true again, and you'll believe them.

MISS DALRYMPLE (*joyfully*).

You won't. (*In a loud voice*) I wish I had Sir George here. *He* would be nice to me.

[*LORD WILLIAM shakes her hand off angrily.*

MISS DALRYMPLE.

Sir George is so intelligent. *Is* anything the matter? Dear George—

[*LORD WILLIAM stamps and moves away.*

A Drawing-Room Play.

MISS DALRYMPLE.

You are not going, are you? You don't inconvenience me a bit—you're so unobtrusive. It is so nice never to be contradicted, and to say just what one likes. (*Silence. Stamps her foot.*) I wish you'd say *something*, even if it were unpleasant. I hate grumpy people. I do think (*pulling out handkerchief*) you might be kind to me when you know what trouble I am in. Lady Gwen. said I might depend on your being nice to me—do you call this being nice?

[LORD WILLIAM *smiles and nods.*

MISS DALRYMPLE.

Oh, you do? By the way, I never gave you back your ring. I tied it round my neck to remember. (*Tries to untie ribbon.*) You might undo it for me. (*Holds up ribbon. LORD WILLIAM retreats and shakes head.*) Well, you *are* rude. Here it is. You can give it to Miss Somerton. (*Holds it out. LORD WILLIAM turns away.*) Won't you have it? You could have lovely studs made out of it, and you could think of me when you wore them. I suppose there could be no harm in thinking of me even if I were Lady Marchmont.

[LORD WILLIAM *turns sharp round angrily and stops.*

MISS DALRYMPLE.

Or Mrs. Sainuel. I don't think Samuel would mind. I am sure he wouldn't feel at all unkindly towards you. He doesn't thirst for people's blood a bit.

[*Tenders the ring again. LORD WILLIAM takes it and throws it to the other side of the room.*

LORD WILLIAM.

Damnation!

[*Exit.*

MISS DALRYMPLE.

(*waits till he is quite gone and looks for ring.*)

What waste, and what a naughty temper. (*Finds it and slips it on to ribbon again.*) I shall offer it him again presently.

Enter MISS SOMERTON.

MISS DALRYMPLE (*offering hand*).

Oh, how do you do, Miss Somerton?

[MISS SOMERTON *takes no notice.*

MISS DALRYMPLE

(*rather disconcerted*).

I did not know you were staying here.

MISS SOMERTON. (*very coldly*).

The surprise is mutual. I never thought you would be—courageous enough to return *here*.

On the Fire System:

MISS DALRYMPLE. (*cheerfully*).

Why not?

MISS SOMERTON.

I understand there are reasons why one would hardly expect to find you received here.

MISS DALRYMPLE.

Because I broke off my engagement to William?

MISS SOMERTON.

I suppose it is wiser to speak of it so.

MISS DALRYMPLE.

I should have thought you would have approved of my breaking off the engagement.

MISS SOMERTON.

I think all Lord William's friends must be glad that he has escaped.

MISS DALRYMPLE.

Escaped? Surely that is not a very kind way to put it?

MISS SOMERTON.

That is the way his friends put it, and that he puts it himself now that he sees more clearly——

MISS DALRYMPLE.

Oh, William says so, does he? Dear William prattles so artlessly.

[*Silence.*

MISS DALRYMPLE.

I must go and examine William on this subject.

MISS SOMERTON.

I do not think you need trouble. Lady Gwen. asked me to look after him and amuse him this afternoon.

MISS DALRYMPLE.

Let us go and look for him together.

[*MISS SOMERTON stares at her coldly from head to foot, moves away. MISS DALRYMPLE follows.*

MISS DALRYMPLE (*stagnily with gesture*).

Lead on—I follow to the death!

[*Exeunt.*

LADY GWEN. and MISS SOMERTON sitting at one side of the room. MISS DALRYMPLE alone at the other.

LADY GWEN. (*rising and going across*).

I must not let dear Susan sit by herself over there. Come over to us, dear.

A Drawing-Room Play.

MISS DALRYMPLE. (*rather bitterly*).

Thank you, dear Gwen.; but I am not good enough for that lady. I come off black if I go nearer.

LADY GWEN.

What nonsense!

MISS DALRYMPLE.

Her purity is so spotless! She cannot touch me with the hem of her garment for fear that her virtue should take to itself wings and disappear. It must be dreadful to have so precarious a grasp of it, mustn't it, Gwen.?

LADY GWEN.

What nonsense! (*Bending down*) Why, Susan dearest, you aren't going to let Blanche get the better of you, are you?

MISS DALRYMPLE.

Yes, dear, I think so? [*In depressed tone.*]

LADY GWEN.

Why, where's your courage?

MISS DALRYMPLE.

I never had any. I was born a coward, thank goodness.

LADY GWEN.

Aren't you going to fight for me? Come, come, brisk up! Courage!

[*Goes back across the room. Miss DALRYMPLE follows, and sits beside Miss SOMERTON.*]

MISS SOMERTON (*rising and going to window*).

What a lovely moonlight night! Shall we go out? Do come, it looks exquisite. You don't mind, Lady Gwen.?

[*Steps out of French window.*]

LADY GWEN.

I should prefer it.

[*Exit Miss SOMERTON. Miss DALRYMPLE hastily turns her back to Lady Gwen, and stamps angrily.*]

MISS DALRYMPLE.

Well, dear, that wasn't much of a success. (*Cheerfully*) We must try again.

LADY GWEN. (*angrily*).

She shall either apologise or she shall leave my house. I will go to her, and you may be sure I shall say what I mean.

Enter Lord William, stands, hesitates, goes across to Miss DALRYMPLE

On the Hire System.

LORD WILLIAM.

Are you afraid to go out too, Miss Dalrymple?

MISS DALRYMPLE.

Very much; the atmosphere is too chilly.

LORD WILLIAM.

It's really quite warm, but I'll fetch you a wrap.

[Turns to go.

MISS DALRYMPLE *(rises and goes across the room)*.

You need not. I was alluding to the mental atmosphere.

LORD WILLIAM.

What has Blanche——

MISS DALRYMPLE.

Miss Somerton's efforts have been crowned with success. I said the atmosphere was chilly. I made a mistake. She is making this house too hot to hold me.

LORD WILLIAM.

Has Gwen.——

MISS DALRYMPLE.

Gwen. has been in every way most kind.

LORD WILLIAM.

Have I failed in respect?

[Follows her and stands behind her.

MISS DALRYMPLE. *(shakes her head)*.

In no way; but your guests are not so punctilious.

LORD WILLIAM.

In what way?

MISS DALRYMPLE.

Oh, they behave towards me as the smartly improper ought to behave towards a suspected offender, though Miss Somerton is good enough to say that if a girl is in a good set it is really almost as respectable for her to run away before her marriage as after.

LORD WILLIAM.

Confound her impudence!

MISS DALRYMPLE.

You see her friends solve the difficulty by not running away at all. Everything comes in time to her who has a detachable husband. *(Laughing a little.)* Well, well—it is a queer world, my dear William—*(throws herself on chair)*—it is only the truly virtuous like you and me who are thoroughly uncomfortable.

LORD WILLIAM *(sitting on arm of chair)*.

I am not in the least uncomfortable, thank you.

A Drawing-Room Play.

MISS DALRYMPLE (*laughing a little*).
Perhaps you are not truly virtuous.

LORD WILLIAM.

Tell me what I can do. (*Walks up and down the room.*)
Do you suppose I do not reproach myself? If it had not been
for my beastly tomfoolery——

MISS DALRYMPLE (*turning with a frown*).

No, do not blame yourself. I should have been more
careful, but I was so dull, . . . and I thought Samuel made it
all right. . . . Perhaps I may mention now that I have a
brother Samuel. (*Laughs.*) It's a horrid name, isn't it?
I couldn't marry any one of the name.

LORD WILLIAM.

Susan! (*Comes quickly across and bends over her.*)
Were you all the time talking what young beasts call
tommy-rot?

MISS DALRYMPLE.

I'm sorry.

LORD WILLIAM.

Can you forgive me for putting you in a hole?

MISS DALRYMPLE.

I forgave it long ago.

LORD WILLIAM.

You darling! You might go a little farther.

MISS DALRYMPLE.

I've gone a little farther.

LORD WILLIAM.

Have you? How—how—far have you gone?

MISS DALRYMPLE.

Miss Somerton will tell you.

[*Looks up and begins to laugh a little.*]

LORD WILLIAM.

Could you go a little farther still?

MISS DALRYMPLE.

How far do you want me to go?

LORD WILLIAM.

I want you to be my wife.

[*Takes her hand and raises her from chair.*]

MISS DALRYMPLE.

You are infinitely good, but how can I when your friends
won't receive me?

LORD WILLIAM.

Stuff and nonsense! Has Gwen, not received you?

[*Putting arm round her waist.*]



On the Hire System:

Yes.

MISS DALRYMPLE.

LORD WILLIAM.

Well, she's the only relation that matters. She's the only near one I've got—except you.

MISS DALRYMPLE.

My dear William—except who?

LORD WILLIAM.

My wife. (*Stoops and kisses her hair.*) You called me your dear William.

MISS DALRYMPLE.

Oh, you are going far too quick!

LORD WILLIAM.

Not a bit.

MISS DALRYMPLE.

I can't marry you if people won't speak to me.

Re-enter LADY GWEN. MISS DALRYMPLE starts away from LORD WILLIAM.

LADY GWEN.

Why did you not come out, Susan? It was lovely.

LORD WILLIAM.

She was better employed.

[*Taking* MISS DALRYMPLE'S hand again,

Re-enter MISS SOMERTON.

MISS DALRYMPLE (*rather confused*).

Oh, it was too cold—too hot—too——

LORD WILLIAM.

The fact was I made her stay, and hereafter Susan has got to do all I tell her.

LADY GWEN.

(*running up and embracing her.*)

Susan! Oh, you dear girl! Are you going to marry him?

LORD WILLIAM

(*turning to* MISS SOMERTON).

I have to thank you for giving Susan the turn in the right direction, Miss Somerton. I believe it was entirely owing to your influence that she has stuck to her resolution to be my wife.

[*Takes* MISS DALRYMPLE'S hand. MISS SOMERTON *frolics and turns away.*

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